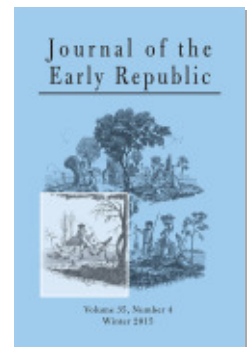## PROJECT MUSE®

A "Voice of Benevolence from the Western Wilderness":
The Politics of Native Philanthropy in the Trans-Mississippi
West

Anelise Hanson Shrout

➡ *For additional information about this article*

A "Voice of Benevolence from the Western Wilderness"

The Politics of Native Philanthropy in the Trans-Mississippi West

ANELISE HANSON SHROUT

In March of 1847 an unusual meeting took place at Fort Gibson in the Western Cherokee Nation. Before a crowd of Indians, missionaries, and soldiers, United States Lieutenant Colonel Loomis "requested a gentleman present to read some newspaper accounts of the famine" decimating Ireland, and then called for contributions for "the relief of the famishing poor." Those who attended the meeting evidently were moved to give. The *Arkansas Intelligencer* reported "the persons present contributed $103.30 . . . increased by a collection after service on Sunday the 14th to $130." Ten days later a similar gathering took place in the Choctaw Nation. At that meeting, the U.S. representative to the Choctaws, Major Armstrong, read a circular produced by the "Memphis committee" for Irish relief. Afterwards "all subscribed" including "agents, missionaries, traders and Indians, a considerable portion of which fund was made up by the latter." Together, these meetings raised over eight hundred dollars.[1]

The Cherokee and Choctaws who gave to Irish famine victims were

1. *Arkansas Intelligencer* (Van Buren), Mar. 20, 1847; repr. in the *Baltimore Sun*, Apr. 28, 1847.

unlikely donors. They had been forcibly removed from their lands in the Southeast only a decade earlier; they had limited financial and emotional resources to share with distant sufferers; and while nineteenth-century American charitable attention was beginning to shift away from proximate sufferers and toward those at a distance, never before had Native peoples contributed such a "considerable portion" of funds for overseas relief. Although these donations were singular and unprecedented, Cherokee and Choctaw famine relief remains largely under-studied. The donations are occasionally cited as evidence of the diversity of famine donors, but are often dismissed as anomalous instances of generosity. This is due in part to historiography that casts Indians primarily as recipients of American philanthropy, rather than philanthropic actors in their own right.[2]

This article takes seriously Cherokee and Choctaw charitable impulses by tracing the treatment of the Irish famine and famine philanthropy in the Indian press, situating Native donations within antebellum philanthropic culture, and demonstrating that Indian participation in transnational giving bought moral and political capital after most Cherokees and Choctaws had been forced west of the Mississippi and out of most Americans' national consciousness. White commentators cast Indian famine donations as evidence of missionaries' success in inculcating Anglo American religious and charitable norms among Native peoples. While public charity was certainly among the tools that Indians used to make claims to civility in the aftermath of removal, writers within Indian Territory framed Native philanthropy not as an act of uncritical or anomalous charity, but as a way to make positive claims about Indian morality. They argued that Cherokee and Choctaw philanthropy was evidence of intrinsic Native—rather than adopted American—sensibilities. In the 1840s Americans characterized charity as the actions of people who were white and well-off to alleviate the suffering of people who were neither. Cherokee and Choctaw famine donations turned this model on its head. Both the givers and the recipients of aid experienced distress, and charity

---

2. Emily S. Rosenberg, "Missions to the World: Philanthropy Abroad," in *Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History*, ed. Lawrence J. Friedman and Mark D. McGarvie (Cambridge, UK, 2002), 241–57. Christine Kinealy, *Charity and the Great Hunger in Ireland: The Kindness of Strangers* (London, 2013), 105. Ronald Austin Wells, *The Honor of Giving: Philanthropy in Native America* (Bloomington, IN, 1998), 1.

flowed between two groups who were cast by American cultures as white in some circumstances and non-white in others. Indian Territory commentators also used the philanthropic association between Indians and Irish to highlight parallels between widely condemned British imperialism and United States' own Indian policies. This kind of political commentary, subsumed as it was within the vernacular of charity, was particularly useful in the 1840s, when Cherokees and Choctaws were able to act politically through structures of tribal governance, but had no mechanisms to challenge U.S. settlers' abuses of Native bodies and property and Federal abuses of Native land claims. Through these dual frameworks for understanding Native famine relief, the Cherokee and Choctaw donations become a story of remarkable resilience in the aftermath of removal and an illustration of how people excluded from many formal structures of power found ways to engage in both local and global politics.[3]
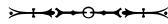
News circulated widely within Indian Territory, shaping Native knowledge of Irish suffering and conditioning Cherokee and Choctaw philanthropic responses. This information environment was made possible by a vibrant Indian print culture with roots in the Cherokee Nation before removal. In 1828 Elias Boudinot had established the first Indian-language newspaper, the *Cherokee Phoenix*, in Georgia. Phillip H. Round has argued that Boudinot used the paper to develop a Cherokee reading public, and to interject Cherokee experiences into the "dominant [white] public sphere." In 1844, as one of its first official acts after removal, the Cherokee Nation government established the *Cherokee Advocate* with similar aims, exemplified by the slogan "Our Rights, Our Country, Our Race." Four years later missionaries in the Choctaw nation founded the *Choctaw Telegraph*. Despite its evangelist origins, this paper was intended to serve the Choctaw people's secular as well as religious needs. It boasted robust news and political commentary, and its first editor was

---

3. William G. McLoughlin, *After the Trail of Tears: The Cherokees' Struggle for Sovereignty, 1839–1880* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1993), 34. Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA, 1999). John Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730–1830* (Baltimore, 2003).
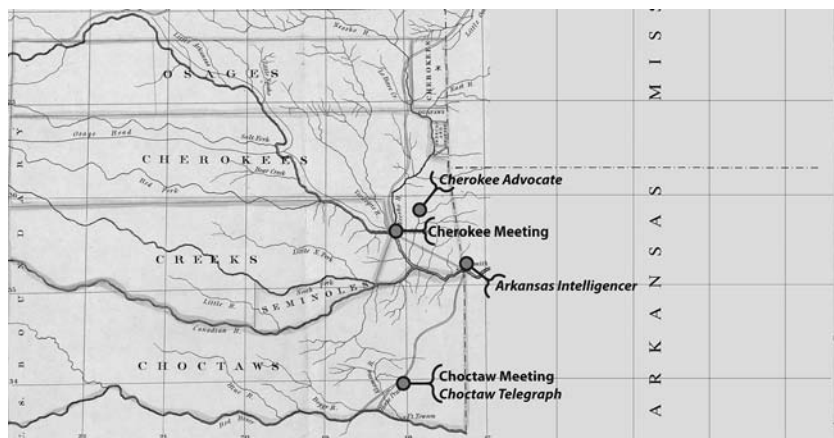
Figure 1: Famine relief meetings and the headquarters of Indian Territory newspapers. Adapted from United States Topographical Bureau, *Map Showing the Lands Assigned to Emigrant Indians West of Arkansas and Missouri*. Map 1836. Library of Congress Geography and Map Division.

Daniel Folsom, "one of a famous Choctaw family." These papers were published in English as well as in Native syllabaries, and were intended to reach as wide a range of readers as possible, both within and beyond Indian Territory. (See Figure 1.)[4]

Other vehicles also brought Irish news to Indian Territory. In the middle decades of the nineteenth century, periodicals around the globe forced readers to bear witnesses to Irish suffering. Many of these reports were available in Indian Territory. For instance, the *Arkansas Intelligencer*, a Democratic paper intended to spread news "from a point further west than was ever before paper published in the United States," was published twenty-five miles from the Choctaw capital and six miles

---

4. Phillip H. Round, *Removable Type: Histories of the Book in Indian Country, 1663–1880* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2010), 132; Timothy Sweet, "Native Americans and American Identities in the Early Republic," *American Literary History* 13, no. 3 (2001), 592–603, quote on 593; James D. Morrison, "News for the Choctaws," *Chronicles of Oklahoma* 27, no. 2 (1949), 207–22; Daniel Littlefield, "Choctaw Newspapers," in *Choctaw Language and Culture: Chahta Anumpa*, ed. Marcia Haag and Henry Willis (Norman, OK, 2001), 313–16; Theda Perdue, "Rising from the Ashes: The Cherokee Phoenix as an Ethnohistorical Source," *Ethnohistory* 24, no. 3 (1977), 207–208.

from the border of Indian Territory. Native agents for the paper distrib-
uted it widely within the Cherokee and Choctaw nations. Articles from
more distant papers were also reprinted in the Native press. Although
reprinting from overseas papers declined in much of the United States
in the 1830s as foreign correspondents became more common, news-
papers in Indian Territory relied on faraway periodicals for much of their
nonlocal news. In the course of reporting on the famine, Indian Territory
newspapers cited the *New York Globe*, *New York Tribune*, *Scientific
America* (New York), the *Reveille* (Matamoros, Mexico), both the *New
Orleans Picayune* and *Delta*, the *New Era* (Jackson, TN), the *Missouri
Republican* (St. Louis), the *Louisville* (KY) *Democrat*, the *Dollar Times*
(Boston), the *Cincinnati Times* (OH), and the *Albany* (NY) *Cultivator*.
In addition, the *Cherokee Advocate* and *Arkansas Intelligencer* quoted
occasionally from the *London Times*, the *Cork Examiner,* the *Cork
Reporter,* the *Dublin Nation*, and the *Liverpool Times.* Reprinted articles
from these periodicals, as well as editorial commentary in the *Advocate*,
Telegraph, and *Intelligencer,* introduced people in Indian Territory to
Irish suffering. (See Figure 2.)[5]

The usual caveats regarding the relationship between literacy and
news consumption apply here. Theda Purdue has noted that the 1835
census of the Cherokee Nation recorded only 18 percent of Cherokee
households as literate in English, 43 percent literate in Cherokee, and
39 percent totally illiterate. However, others have argued that the very
production of newspapers so soon after removal should been taken as an
indication of Indians' desire for a print culture, even if levels of literacy
were relatively low. News also spread beyond newspapers' formal circu-
lation and readership. Studies of nineteenth-century information have
noted that simply tracking the distribution of newspapers and readers
undervalues the spread of news, because individual issues could be
loaned out many times and read aloud to public audiences. By the time
that famine relief meetings were held in May of 1847, individual readers,
public recitals, and conversation and gossip in spaces like homes, post

---

5. Richard Kielbowicz, ''Newsgathering by Printers' Exchanges Before the
Telegraph,'' *Journalism History* 9, no. 2 (1982), 42–48. William F. Pope and
Dunbar H. Pope, *Early Days in Arkansas: Being for the Most Part the Personal
Recollections of an Old Settler* (Little Rock, AR, 1895), 137. *Arkansas Intelligencer*
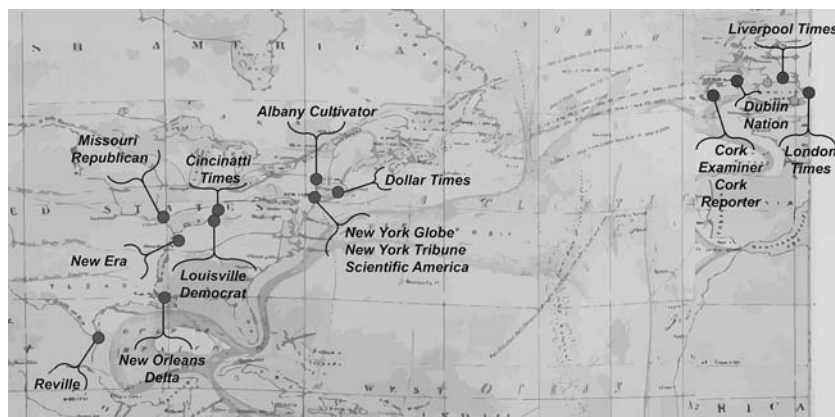(Van Buren), Feb. 15, 1845.

Figure 2: Newspapers cited in Indian Territory Famine Reporting. Adapted from John Bartholomew, Adam Black, and Charles Black, *Chart Shewing (sic) the Communication between Europe, North America, and the Pacific.* Map 1854. David Rumsey Map Collection.

offices, and markets had spread news of Irish suffering, appeals, and donations throughout Indian Territory.[6]

<p style="text-align:center">>—I—◆>—•—◆—I—<</p>
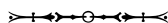
While news of the famine certainly circulated in the Cherokee and Choctaw nations, the individual Cherokees and Choctaws who learned of Ireland and donated left little mark on the historical record. Some would have practiced philanthropy before, but on a local rather than a transnational scale. Many would have been destitute or ill. Most would have experienced enormous financial, emotional, and demographic damage as a result of removal. It is difficult to imagine a people less well-positioned to act philanthropically.[7]

---

6. Perdue, "Rising from the Ashes," 213. Sharon M. Murphy, "Native Print Journalism in the United States: Dreams and Realities," *Anthropologica* 25, no. 1 (1983), 23–30. Ellen Cushman, "The Cherokee Syllabary from Script to Print," *Ethnohistory* 57, no. 4 (2010), 625–49. Cushman, "The Elusive Reading Revolution," in Isabelle Lehuu, *Carnival on the Page: Popular Print Media in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000), 14–35. Round, *Removable Type*. Richard Daniel Altick, *The English Common Reader* (Chicago, 1957).

7. Russell Thornton, *The Cherokees: A Population History* (Lincoln, NE, 1990). Matthew T. Gregg and David M. Wishart, "The Price of Cherokee Removal," *Explorations in Economic History* 49, no. 4 (2012), 423–42.

The tribal records preserved from this period were almost entirely concerned with negotiating land claims after removal. However, United States army and missionary accounts of life in Indian Territory shed light on those Cherokees and Choctaws who were likely to have attended famine relief meetings in March of 1847. Reports from the Choctaw Nation emphasized the plight of those who had recently arrived in Indian Territory. Although Choctaw elites had agreed to removal in the 1831 Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek, many were still making their way West in 1847. Throughout 1847, the same Major Armstrong who organized Choctaw famine relief noted the passage and settlement of recently removed Cherokees and Choctaws past the Choctaw agency buildings. Others described these travelers in greater detail. In a March 1847 letter one missionary described the ''emigrants [who] had been removed since last March'' and noted ''several hundred were still encamped about the Agency'' most of whom ''appeared very much degraded and extremely filthy.'' A report sent to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs in July of 1847 also remarked on the persistence of Choctaw destitution, describing ''much sickness among them'' and feared that ''as the summer advances the sickness will no doubt increase, as there is no provision for medical attention or for simple remedies to be given them.''[8]

---

8. Commissioner of Indian Affairs to Colonel James McKissick, Mar. 5, 1847, Letters Sent By the Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives, Microfilm Publication M21, Roll 39, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, NARA–Northeast Region (New York City). E. Hotchkin to Henry Hill Esq, n.d., ABC 18.3.5 Choctaw and Pawnee Missions, Treasury Department, 1821–1846 v.2 (Microfilm Reel 764) American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions Archives, 1810–1961(ABC 1-91), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (used by permission). Grant Foreman, *Indian Removal: The Emigration of the Five Civilized Tribes of Indians* (Norman, OK, 1972). William G. McLoughlin, *Cherokee Renascence in the New Republic* (Princeton, NJ, 1986), 411. Theda Perdue, ''The Conflict Within: The Cherokee Power Structure and Removal,'' *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 73 (Fall 1989), 467–91. Records of the Cherokee and Choctaw Nations in the decade after removal—preserved in the Cherokee Nation Papers, University of Oklahoma, The Headquarters Records for Fort Gibson, Indian Territory, NARA, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, NARA, Stephen Foreman Collections, University of Oklahoma, Norman, and J. L. Hargett Collection of Choctaw Nation Papers, 1821–1917, Yale University, New Haven, CT—are sparse, and the material that remains is primarily concerned with land claims and the administration of Indian Territory. While some few references to Native philanthropy appear as asides in the documents compiled by the Bureau of Indian

Reports from Fort Gibson in the Cherokee Nation emphasized violence rather than illness. In the 1830s the Principal Cherokee Chief, John Ross, and the majority of the Cherokee Nation had publicly and adamantly opposed removal. However, a minority of Cherokee elites believed that neither federal nor state authorities could be trusted to treat the Cherokee Nation in the Southeast justly, and in 1835 agreed to the removal treaty of New Echota. By 1838 few Cherokees had left voluntarily, and the U.S. army began systematically to round up, imprison, and march those who remained along the Trail of Tears to Indian Territory. After their arrival in 1839 Ross's adherents killed the leaders of those who supported removal. Hostilities escalated throughout the 1840s. The United States government interceded and a tentative peace was established in 1846, although violence continued to shape life in the Cherokee Nation. One week before the Fort Gibson famine meeting, the Commissioner of Indian Affairs wrote to the Colonel James McKissick in the Cherokee Nation to lament the "murders and outrages in the Cherokee Country" and suggested that, although the U.S. government should not intervene, the Office of Indian Affairs would "cheerfully cooperate with the Cherokee Authority" to administer "one or two wholesome examples of punishment" to those disrupting the peace.[9]

Violent episodes like these undermined Cherokee efforts to present a unified front to the United States. Similarly, the destitution evinced in the Choctaw Nation undermined claims to civility and self-sufficiency in the years after removal. In the midst of these challenges, writers in the Indian Territory press deployed famine philanthropy as an alternative way to articulate Indians' political and social aims.

<div align="center">➤–◆➤–◯–◆–◆➤–◄</div>
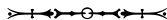
Transnational philanthropy represented a significant break with earlier philanthropic conventions in both the United States and Indian Territory. In the early decades of the century few people sent charitable funds

---

Affairs and by missionaries in Indian Territory, there are no references to the famine donations in Cherokee and Choctaw Nation collections.

9. John Heald to the Office of Indian Affairs, July 2, 1847, Letters Received By the Bureau of Indian Affairs, National Archives Microfilm Publication M234, Roll 171, Records of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Andrew Denson, *Demanding the Cherokee Nation: Indian Autonomy and American Culture, 1830–1900* (Lincoln, NE, 2004), 42–49.

overseas, preferring instead to attend to causes closer to home. Charitable donations were seen as markers of morality, civility, and social status, and philanthropy was largely concerned with "concrete, direct acts of compassion" through which givers might help—and receive the public gratitude of—sufferers in their immediate spheres of influence. Middle-class reformers used philanthropy to reward those who performed "worthy poverty." In the process donors aggrandized themselves for morally uplifting the destitute. Givers rarely were explicit about the impulse for social control embedded in their charity, but the emotional justification for compassionate acts also carried specific arguments about the status and power relationships between givers and recipients. Sympathy connoted the ability to understand another's suffering, implying that beneficence flowed between equals, while compassion, pity, and mercy were a means by which givers could claim higher status over those who they helped. This is not to say that interest in distant sufferers was unknown in this period. Since the eighteenth century, antislavery and evangelical campaigns had been establishing models for expressing interest in, and lobbying for, the corporeal and spiritual well-being of distant peoples. However, few of these campaigns sent money directly to sufferers, instead preferring to fund umbrella benevolent organizations that could provide spiritual succor.[10]

These norms dictated white commentators' response to the Cherokee and Choctaw donations. Writers cast the donations as evidence of successful acculturation, and missionaries celebrated Indian philanthropy as the successful inculcation of white, Anglo American religious and cultural norms among Native peoples. Acculturation was also seen as politically useful within Indian Territory. For example, Elias Boudinot argued that if Indians could satisfactorily adopt white American life-ways the United States might be less inclined to force removal. In contrast, many

---

10. Robert A. Gross, "Giving in America: From Charity to Philanthropy," in *Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History*, ed. Friedman and Mc-Garvie, 31. Susan M. Ryan, *The Grammar of Good Intentions: Race and the Antebellum Culture of Benevolence* (Ithaca, NY, 2003), 47. Wendy Gamber, "Antebellum Reform: Salvation, Self-Control, and Social Transformation," in *Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History*, ed. Friedman and McGarvie, 129–54. Nicole Eustace, *Passion Is the Gale: Emotion, Power, and the Coming of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2008), 268–71. Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2006).

white Americans saw the very fact that acculturation was possible as evidence of Native inferiority, and justification for expropriation and removal. Agreeing that Indian adoption of white American practices was desirable acknowledged the benefits of white culture and reinforced American assumptions about the value inherent in Indian and white American behavior.[11]

In keeping with these assumptions, the Arkansas *Intelligencer* celebrated the Cherokee and Choctaw donations as a "voice of benevolence from the western wilderness of the western hemisphere" and championed "The 'poor Indian' sending his mite to the poor Irish!" The *Intelligencer* forcefully developed this theme, enjoining readers to note

What an agreeable reflection it must give to the Christian and the philanthropist, to witness this evidence of civilisation and Christian spirit existing among our red neighbors. They are repaying the Christian world a consideration for bringing them out from benighted ignorance and heathen barbarism. Not only by contributing a few dollars but by affording evidence that the labours of the Christian missionary have not been in vain.

In one breath the *Intelligencer* praised Native donors for their generosity, but in the next gave actual credit to missionaries, and reminded readers that despite this act of startling generosity their "red neighbors" were still only a few steps away from "benighted ignorance and heathen barbarism." Commentators across the United States shared the *Intelligencer's* perspective. For instance, in late April of 1847, Thomas P. Cope, a Philadelphia merchant who coordinated both Quaker famine relief projects and Indian conversion missions wrote that "among the novel & interesting occurrences of the times, not the least extraordinary & gratifying is the circumstance of the Choctaw Indians having held a meeting at their agency for the relief of the starving poor of Ireland, at which

---

11. Lee Irwin, "Freedom, Law, and Prophecy: A Brief History of Native American Religious Resistance," *American Indian Quarterly* 21 (Jan. 1997), 35–55. Mary E. Young, "Conflict Resolution on the Indian Frontier," *Journal of the Early Republic* 16 (Spring 1996), 1–19. Circe Sturm, *Blood Politics: Race, Culture, and Identity in the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma* (Berkeley, CA, 2002), 17. William G. McLoughlin, *The Cherokees and Christianity, 1794–1870* (Athens, GA, 1994), 19.

$710 were contributed, the agent, the missionaries & the Indians sub-scribing."[12]

>─┼─◆─┼─◯─┼─◆─┼─<
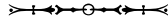
Native commentators challenged interpretations that cast the donations merely as evidence of acculturation. In a speech reprinted in the *Advocate* in May of 1847, John Ross praised those Cherokees who had already given to Ireland and upon whom "Providence has bestowed . . . an abundance for their own subsistence, and to a considerable extent, the means of relieving the destitute." For Ross, Native self-sufficiency and innate inclination, rather than Christian virtue, had caused Irish famine relief. An anonymous editorial published in July of 1847 in the *Advocate* proclaimed that "Among the many noble deeds of disinterested benevo-lence which the present famine in Europe has called forth, none can be more gratifying to enlightened men than the liberality of our red brethren . . . displayed at a late meeting in the Cherokee nation." The writer went on to note that Native philanthropy was "the more acceptable that it comes from those upon whom the white man has but little claim. It teaches us that the Indian, made like as we are, has a humanity common among us." Enjoinders like these undermined missionaries' claims that Native donations were the consequence of the uncritical adoption of Christian charity. If that were the case, we might expect Cherokee and Choctaw contributions to have been more equably distributed among the other European countries suffering from famine in 1847. Scotland, parts of England, the Netherlands, and Belgium experienced crop fail-ures were of equal magnitude, though with lower rates of mortality than Ireland. The Cherokee and Choctaw press, however, emphasized Irish suffering over that of other Europeans. In fact, after praising Cherokee famine donors John Ross went on to chastise those who paid too much attention to the starving Irish at the expense of the Scots. He argued that it was "particularly incumbent on the Cherokee people" to afford relief to the Scottish, but that so far, the "the attention of the benevolent com-munity has seemed to be directed more to Ireland." Christine Kinealy has argued that the Cherokees gave to the Scots in particular because

---

12. *Arkansas Intelligencer* (Van Buren), repr. in the *Baltimore Sun*, Apr. 28, 1847. *Arkansas Intelligencer*, Mar. 20, 1847. Thomas P. Cope, "Diary, Volume 9" (Philadelphia, 1847), 23, Friends Historical Library, Haverford College Special Collections, Haverford, PA.

many people of Scottish descent had intermarried with Cherokees in Georgia. However, appeals for aid in Indian Territory newspapers focused predominantly on Ireland, suggesting that Cherokees, at least had reasons other than shared heritage for giving, that the Indian Territory press was particularly interested in reporting Irish distress, and that Irish sufferers were deliberately selected as recipients of aid.[13]

Although Indian authors never connected transnational philanthropy with traditional giving practices, it is likely that readers saw famine relief as part of the long history of Cherokee and Choctaw charity. Giving and receiving gifts were parts of everyday life in both the Cherokee and Choctaw nations. These were people familiar with aiding others, and who considered giving a necessary part of community life, no matter how widely dispersed the community. This was reflected in the multiplicity of local charitable projects undertaken by Cherokees and Choctaws in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. Many were infrastructural: constructing a new church, funding a female seminary, or purchasing materials for an industrial school. More rarely, some gave in response to appeals to contribute to the administrative costs of the missions themselves. Scholars of Native giving practices argue that in contrast to American charitable norms Cherokee and Choctaw gift-giving did not demonstrate social power relations. Rather, it was a necessity born of the need to constantly redistribute goods to the benefit of the tribe or local community. In consequence, actions that looked like charity to white Americans would have been read simply as the discharging of expected obligations for Cherokees and Choctaws. From this perspective famine relief might be read as a tacit articulation of kinship with distantly suffering strangers who nevertheless shared experiences with Cherokees and Choctaws. Similarly, Laura Wittstock has argued that few accounts of Native giving were recorded in United States records because they would have "confirm[ed] the sense Native people had of *their* continued sovereignty as nations . . . as examples of tribal action independent of federal government tutelage." From this perspective, a rejection of missionaries' claims that Indian donations were evidence of their own success might

13. *Cherokee Advocate* (Tahlequah, Cherokee Nation), May 6, 1847. *Cherokee Advocate*, July 15, 1847. *Cherokee Advocate,* May 6, 1847. Peter Gray, "Famine Relief Policy in Comparative Perspective: Ireland, Scotland, and Northwestern Europe, 1845–1849," *Éire-Ireland* 32 (Spring 1997), 86–108. Christine Kinealy, *The Great Irish Famine: Impact, Ideology, and Rebellion* (New York, 2002), 80.

also have been a rejection of the United States' claims of control in Indian Territory. The Cherokee and Choctaw donations could—and likely did—carry more than one meaning, and signaled more than one kind of critical engagement with the citizens and politics of the United States.[14]

<center>⊱―╼◆╾・○・╼◆╾―⊰</center>
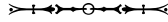
In addition to their significance in debates about Native morality, the Indian Territory press also used philanthropic acts that appeared acceptable and personal to mainstream American culture to make tacit comparisons between British misgovernment and American policy. In drawing these parallels Indian commentators were not alone; the appropriation of Irish distress was common in the 1840s. David Sim has demonstrated how American political elites explicitly invoked the famine to critique British economic policies, and has also noted that famine relief from private U.S. citizens was useful as "a *national* movement at a time of pervasive sectional tensions." Politicized philanthropy was also not unique to the famine. Christopher Brown and Laura Stevens have emphasized the political benefits that accrued to nations and empires that celebrated abolitionists and conversion missions. Similarly Lauren Benton has called for a move away from "the oppositional framings of

---

14. Laura W. Wittstock, "American Indian Giving and Philanthropy: The Overlaid Relationship," *Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs*, 6–7. Vote of Thanks to Hon. E Boudinot, Sept. 15, 1813, ABC 8.5, Valuable documents, 1811–1847, American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions Archives, 1810–1861 (ABC 1-91), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (used by permission). Jacob Hitchcock to Henry Hill Esq., Jan. 26, 1842, ABC 18.3.2, Cherokee Mission, Treasury Department, 1820–1846, v. 4 (Microfilm Reel 752) American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission Archives, 1810–1861 (ABC 1-91), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (used by permission). Jacob Hitchcock to Henry Hill Esq., Sept. 16 1846, ibid. The Indian Presbytery Report to the Synod of Memphis, ABC 18.3.4, Choctaw Mission, 1824–1859 and earlier, v. 6, Pt. I. (Microfilm Reel 759), American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions Archives, 1810–1861 (ABC 1-91), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (used by permission). Letter of C. Kingsbury, Mar. 23, 1846, ABC 18.3.5, Choctaw and Pawnee Missions, Treasury Department, 1821–1846, v.2 (Microfilm Reel 764), American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions Archives, 1810–1861 (ABC 1-91), Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (used by permission). Wells, *The Honor of Giving*. Abraham Rosman and Paula G. Rubel, "The Potlatch: A Structural Analysis," *American Anthropologist* 74, no. 3 (1972), 658–71.

humanitarianism and economic functionalism" and toward an emphasis on the legal utility of transnational philanthropy in order to understand the multiplicity of uses to which philanthropy was put during the nineteenth century.[15]

Politicized philanthropy also played into individual attempts to expand political participation beyond the electorate. In North America of the 1840s politics was restricted to white men. Scholars note that organizations, clubs, and churches as well as "out-of-door" politics performed at fêtes, parades, public demonstrations, and riots provided a means to push back against these political barriers, giving new venues for critiquing state power to women, people of color, and others typically outside the political sphere. Without discounting the importance of these spaces, this article calls for a still broader conception of politics, one that goes beyond electoral processes to encompass apparently apolitical actions like charitable giving.[16]

Indian donations operated in the kind of transnational, multi-ethnic political culture identified by David Featherstone as contesting elite "globalizing processes such as colonialism through the formation of spatially stretched alliances and political networks." They also replicated some of the mechanisms identified by E. P. Thompson's work on bread riots. Thomson argued that seemingly apolitical popular movements

---

15. David Sim, *A Union Forever: The Irish Question and U.S. Foreign Relations in the Victorian Age* (Ithaca, NY, 2013), 39, 52. Lauren Benton, "Abolition and Imperial Law, 1790–1820," *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 39, no. 3 (2011), 355–74, quote on 369. Brown, *Moral Capital.* Laura M. Stevens, *The Poor Indians?: British Missionaries, Native Americans, and Colonial Sensibility* (Philadelphia, 2004).

16. Ronald P. Formisano, "The Concept of Political Culture," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 31, no. 3 (2001), 393–426. For studies of the application of out-of-door politics, see Sara C. Fanning, "The Roots of Early Black Nationalism: Northern African Americans' Invocations of Haiti in the Early Nineteenth Century," *Slavery & Abolition* 28, no. 1 (2007), 61–85. Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson, and David Waldstreicher, *Beyond the Founders: New Approaches to the Political History of the Early American Republic* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2004). Theda Perdue, *Cherokee Women: Gender and Culture Change, 1700–1835* (Lincoln, NE, 1998). David Waldstreicher, *In the Midst of Perpetual Fetes: The Making of American Nationalism, 1776–1820* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997). Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788–1850* (New York, 2004).

should be understood as a form of legitimate "direct popular action" with clear goals, rather than as the spontaneous outbursts of crowds. In the Cherokee and Choctaw case donations were given additional weight by the Indian Territory press. Accounts of both donations were published in both English and Native syllabaries, and were intended to reach as wide range of readers as possible, both Indian and white. Given this duality of audience, it should not be surprising that neither paper contained outright castigations of American Indian policy, adopting instead positions of deference and acquiescence. In consequence, reports of the famine and famine relief published in these papers might also be viewed through James Scott's lens of "hidden transcripts," which carry one meaning for a dominant culture and still another "unstated" meaning for subordinate groups. Though limited in potency, discrepancies between these meanings should be viewed as "strategies to thwart and reverse" dominant political structures.[17]

The unstated meaning of Indian Territory famine philanthropy relied on the assumption that Britain had failed to appropriately govern its Irish subjects, and that the Irish and Indians were "fellow beings." Articles printed across the United States and within Indian Territory cast the Irish as multivalent victims of imperial, national, and local misgovernment. Native donations were conditioned not by firsthand knowledge of Irish starvation, but by narratives that were intentionally constructed by newspaper writers and editors. Famine reporting in Indian Territory linked the experiences of the suffering Irish to Indians' own experiences at the hands of the United States. The famine, in consequence, took on symbolic meaning beyond the particulars of an Irish crisis, and Indian famine donations drew attention to multivalent failures to care for subject peoples.

⤔—⊶•⊙•⊷—⤖
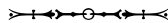
Copies of the reports read at the Cherokee and Choctaw do not survive, but pamphlets distributed by other groups give a sense of how famine

---

17. David Featherstone, "The Spatial Politics of the Past Unbound: Transnational Networks and the Making of Political Identities," in *Global Networks* 7, no. 4 (2007), 430–52, quote on 435. E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past & Present*, no. 50 (1971), 76–136, quote on 78. Theda Perdue, "Rising from the Ashes." James C. Scott,

relief was linked to broader concerns. Throughout the 1840s, committees across the United States collected funds, often spearheaded by the Society of Friends in Dublin. One pamphlet, distributed from Philadelphia in December 1846 as part of an early effort to solicit donations enjoined "upon all the propriety of responding with liberality to the loud call thus made upon us," and noted that no matter what amount given "that little may save a fellow human being from starvation, and that it is the spirit of the giver, and not the largeness of the gift, which is regarded in the Divine sight." Another published in February of 1847 contained graphic accounts of recent visitor's impressions: "Thou wouldst hardly recognize the country in passing through it—everything alive but man has disappeared—no dogs—no pigs—no poultry; the people have a sickly, livid hue . . . the failure is *complete*, and the destitution of the cottier population is *total*; they have *nothing*."[18]

These accounts of abject and unrecognizable suffering echoed Cherokee and Choctaw experiences of removal. The sickness, starvation, and death that pervaded nearly every firsthand account of the Trail of Tears would have been familiar to famine-struck Irish. Scholars estimate that in total, over 13,000 people died in the course of removal, and still more suffered before it. James Mooney, an amateur ethnographer, described the process of removal, as told to him "from the lips of the actors in the tragedy":

Stockade forts were erected for gathering and holding the Indians preparatory to removal. From these, squads of troops were sent out to search with rifle and bayonet every small cabin hidden away in the coves or by the sides of mountain streams, to seize and bring in as prisoners all of the occupants, however or wherever they might be found. Families at dinner were startled by the sudden gleam of bayonets in the doorway and rose up to be driven with blows and oaths along the weary miles of

Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts (New Haven, CT, 1990), 191–97.

18. Monthly Meeting of Friends of Philadelphia, "Circular . . . In Consequence of the Overwhelming Calamity of Famine" (Philadelphia, 1846), Friends Historical Library, Haverford College Special Collections, Haverford, PA. Philadelphia Society of Friends, "To Members of the Society of Friends. Dear Friends, The Condition of the Inhabitants of Ireland Having Claimed the Attention of Many Friends, a General Meeting of Our Members in This City Was Called, in Order to Consider What Could Be Done by Us to Alleviate the Sufferings of That People" (Philadelphia, 1847), Friends Historical Library.

trail that lead to the stockades . . . in many cases, on turning for one last look as they crossed the ridge, they saw their homes in flames.[19]

The Choctaw district chief Greenwood Leflore reported "a considerable portion of them [the Choctaw emigrants] are poor, and leaving with means hardly sufficient to sustain them on their journey, will reach the place of their future residence in a very destitute condition." Similarly, the missionary Alexander Talley reported that emigrants had "perished with cold and hunger" and had been forced to sleep in "a deep and extensive forest . . . in a linen tent covered with ice and snow for a week, with but two blankets to cover a bed of grass." A traveler who passed groups of Cherokees en route to Indian Territory remarked "We learn from the inhabitants on the road where the Indians passed that they buried fourteen or fifteen at every stopping place, and they made a journey of ten miles per day only on an average." Indian removal cost much in lives and property, and when Cherokees and Choctaws donated to famine relief in 1847 many were still experiencing the emotional trauma of removal.[20]

That trauma likely served as a bridge between Irish and Indian communities. Like the Cherokee and Choctaws the Irish had experienced firsthand what it was like to simultaneously be subject and "other" peoples within an expanding polity. In the wake of the 1840s crop failures, and in an uncanny echo of the Trail of Tears, thousands of Irish were forcibly evicted from their lands, either to be virtually imprisoned in poorhouses or shipped overseas in so-called "coffin ships." These evictions were described in harrowing detail in newspapers across North America. The *Charleston Mercury* wrote of the "Starvation and disease" that "scourg[ed] this unhappy land, and innumerable cases of death have occurred from want of food. There is no money—no work. The village of Ballycotton is in a most wretched condition, and deaths are daily occurring." The Charleston *Courier* detailed "one union in Kilrush [in which] thirteen thousand persons have suffered eviction, five thousand

---

19. James Mooney, *Myths of the Cherokee*, Government Printing Office, Washington DC, included in *Nineteenth Annual Report of the Bureau of American Ethnology to the Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, 1897–98 in Two parts—Part I*, 1900, 128. Thornton, *The Cherokees*.

20. Quoted in Foreman, *Indian Removal*, 39, 41. *New York Observer*, Jan. 26, 1839.

have been unhoused in the county of Limerick, and law processes are out for the demolition of one thousand houses more." The *American Flag*, printed in Matamoros, Mexico, printed an account which described "the Ireland of poor houses and poor laws, and poor law inspectors—the Ireland of hunger and plague—the Ireland which skulks down under mercenary police, and bows to the earth before 40,000 soldiery—the Ireland of traitorous landlords and murderous evictions." In less florid language, The *New York Tribune* similarly noted that it received "every day letters setting forth in frightful detail the system of wholesale eviction which is now desolating the country" and described those evictions as "horrible warfare on the population." It further lamented "nothing is heard of but evictions and deaths from consequent exposure to this inclement weather. Some parishes are completely cleared of the miserable tenants," sent "to the work house or America or Eternity." Over sixty-five thousand Irish families were evicted from their homes in the course of the famine, and stories of those evictions circulated throughout the United States and the trans-Mississippi West.[21]

While these particulars were being printed in Eastern papers, the Indian Territory press condensed accounts from Ireland, the *London Times*, and the British government's famine relief commission. By spring of 1846, Indian Territory readers would have known that "of 32 counties in Ireland, not one has escaped failure of the potato crop; of 130 poor law unions, not one is exempt, of 2058 electoral divisions, above 1400 are certainly reported as having suffered." In the following weeks the Indian Territory Press began to include evocative accounts of Irish recourse to poor houses and coffin ships in consequence of the evictions. In April of 1846 the *Cherokee Advocate* reported,

One account states that the workhouse in Carrick district is not only crowded to repletion but upwards of eighty able bodied men have been refused admission. In Roscrea, an important and populous district, the poor are living in the refuse of diseased potatoes and crowds may be seen from morning till night in the fields, grubbing the stray potatoes that may have remained on the ground after digging . . . wherever one looks, the misery of the poor is really heart rending.

    21. *Charleston* (SC) *Courier*, Feb. 27, 1847. *Mercury* (Charleston, SC), Apr. 17, 1849. *American Flag* (Matamoros, Mexico), May 13, 1848. *New York Tribune*, Feb. 2, 1849. For further discussion of evictions, see Christine Kinealy, *This Great Calamity: The Irish Famine, 1845–52* (Dublin, 1994), 218.

The article closed by editorializing that these conditions constituted "a new and an awful phase in the type of Irish misery and woe." Later articles recounted the effect of evictions on emigration. The first of these published in the *Advocate* quoted from the Matamoros *Reville*: "the quays at Cork, as we read, are crowded to inconvenience with passengers and their luggage. Already one vessel has sailed with a full complement of passengers, and twenty three others, with nearly four thousand emigrants are preparing at that port for sea."[22]

While accounts of Irish distress paralleled Cherokee and Choctaw experiences, many reports in U.S. newspapers questioned whether readers could imagine the conditions of the suffering Irish. In February of 1847, the *Arkansas Intelligencer* reported the Irish experience in terms of a haunting:

Starvation of the most dire description stalks throughout the length and breadth of its [Ireland's] provinces. Disease and death are hurrying their victims from off the state of time, and millions of a brave but misguided people know not how and where to brave the awful misery which haunts their noonday walks and midnight visions.

Similarly, when the *Cherokee Advocate* wrote of the "famine lands" of Ireland in which "old and the young, the feeble and the stout hearted, have been stricken down and hurried to another world," the descriptions were so terrible that the unnamed author posited that readers might "hardly credit the reports of the sufferings, disease and death which have reached us." The *Advocate* later reported "All accounts agree that the distress in Ireland, and the sufferings of the population are unmitigated, and surpass all that imagination can picture." These descriptions of distress echoed the *Arkansas Intelligencer's* suggestion that the Irish people were subject to a kind of inconceivable and supernatural misery. But though many white American readers might not have been able to imagine the sufferings and distress of the Irish people, unfortunately the Cherokees and Choctaws were ideally positioned do so. For them, the "awful misery which haunts their noonday walks and midnight visions,"

---

22. *Cherokee Advocate* (Tahlequah, Cherokee Nation), Apr. 9, 1846. *Cherokee Advocate*, Apr. 23, 1846.

had been experienced in all too recent memory by every family forced west.[23]

The trauma of removal did not end with arrival in Indian Territory. In the 1840s even those Cherokees and Choctaws who had voluntarily emigrated were only beginning to rebuild their lives. Some were wealthy; many of the early émigrés owned plantations and slaves, but many were poor and spent what little resources they had trying to claim funds promised them by the United States government. Josiah Gregg, a trader who often passed through Indian Territory in the 1840s, was "struck with the contrast between an occasional stately [plantation] dwelling, with an extensive farm attached, and the miserable hovels of the indigent, sometimes not ten feet square, with a little patch of corn, scarce large enough for a family garden." Some of these slaveholding Indians likely had the economic resources to send to Irish relief. At the same time, non-slaveholding Indians had the sympathetic resources to give to those whom the *Cherokee Advocate* described as crammed nine to a cabin and "found dying of disease and want, unable to go out for food or medicine."[24]

For both Indians and the Irish the traumas of removal, eviction, and expropriation were bound up not only in the physical experience of traveling but in exile from ancestral lands. The 1829 testimony of Womankiller, a Cherokee elder, illustrated this attachment. In a speech resisting removal, he attested "my aged bones will soon be laid under ground, and I wish them laid in the bosom of this earth we have received from our fathers who had it from the Great Being above. When I shall sleep in forgetfulness, I hope my bones will not be deserted by you." Colonel George S. Gaines, who was tasked with overseeing Choctaw removal, recounted "the feeling which many of them evince in separating, never to return again, from their own long cherished hills, poor as they are in this section of the country, is truly painful to witness." In light of this violent psychic displacement, an 1848 article in the *Memphis Daily Appeal*—a paper that likely informed the "Memphis Committee" whose

---

23. *Arkansas Intelligencer* (Van Buren), Feb. 27, 1847. *Cherokee Advocate* (Tahlequah, Cherokee Nation), May 13, 1847. *Cherokee Advocate*, May 20, 1847.

24. Josiah Gregg, *Commerce of the Prairies* (Santa Barbara, CA, 2001), 387. *Cherokee Advocate* (Tahlequah, Cherokee Nation), Mar. 18, 1847. *Cherokee Advocate*, June 4, 1846.

circular was read at the Choctaw Meeting—might have resonated deeply with Indian readers:

A widow, who, unfortunately for them, was the mother of six children, [who] found refuge in a dilapidated dwelling in one of the lanes [of the city of Limerick]. The Youngest of her children fell ill and died . . . a coffin was begged. Coffin and corpse would have been borne, perhaps, without the mother's assistance, to some graveyard near. But she had lived at a distance of many miles from the city, and in the burial ground of her Native place her friends were interred. The distance was far and as few would consent to carry a coffin containing a stranger so far unnecessarily, the poor mother resolved to bear it herself. She actually did so, she had it placed on her back and slowly and wearily she bore it away, reached the graves of her kindred, scraped a trench we have heard, with her own hands, and thus consigned to the earth, where she wished they should rest, the remains of her offspring.

For Cherokees and Choctaws who buried their relatives by the roadside on the Trail of Tears, or who wished they could have buried their children among their ancestral kin on tribal lands in the American Southeast, this story of a mother carrying her children to the "ground of her Native place" might have evoked both memories and profound sympathy.[25]

As they chronicled Irish suffering Indian Territory newspapers also invoked Native philanthropic projects. The *Advocate* wrote, "In all the large cities, in the towns and villages, and throughout the country public meetings have been held and speedy and energetic measures adopted . . . our neighbors, the Choctaws, have lent a helping hand, and so have the Cherokees." The paper also made an explicit link between Irish sufferers and Native donors, enjoining the latter to "not hesitate" even though "the sufferers are separated from us by hundreds of miles. It should be enough for us to know that those who are dying for bread are our fellow beings." This characterization of Native donations points to the power that philanthropy could wield even as both Indians and Irish were being marginalized both physically and metaphorically by mainstream American and British culture. In these commands to give, the newspaper linked Irish suffering with Indian giving practices. For the *Advocate,*

---

25. *Cherokee Phoenix* (New Echota, Cherokee Nation), Oct. 24, 1829. *Commercial Register* (Mobile, AL), Nov. 12, 1831. *Daily Appeal* (Memphis, TN), May 4, 1848.

Native donations to famine relief were not merely the expression of generosity, but the natural and appropriate behavior of one group of "fellow beings" to another in keeping with Native giving practices.[26]
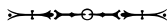
Although Indian Territory commentators never drew explicit connections between the United States treatment of Native peoples and the British treatment of the Irish, descriptions of British injustice in the Indian Territory press mirrored anxieties about the United States' own political identity. While the United States frequently challenged its imperial predecessor, many scholars have noted that it also owed Britain much in terms of identity, ideology, and politics. Indeed, Eliga Gould has argued that the American Revolution was less a rejection of British policies than it was "an attempt to remake the former colonies in Europe's image." Other scholars have noted that the antecedents to Andrew Jackson's Indian removal policies can be found both in pre-Revolutionary British treaties with Native peoples and in the actions of British settlers in pre-Revolutionary North America. Andrew Cayton and Fred Anderson describe American Indian policy as the result of a "fundamental pattern of English intrusion, Indian resistance and Indian exclusion." Patrick Wolfe has similarly emphasized the continuity of Native experiences before and after the American Revolution, arguing that Native expropriation was a central strategy of both British and American settler colonialism.[27]

Despite the debt that United States politics owed to British structures of governance, contemporaries critical of American expansion relied heavily on the example of Britain. In the midst of the Mexican–American War, Henry Clay gave a speech setting Britain up as an exemplary failed empire, especially with respect to subject populations. Clay reminded listeners that despite Britain's longstanding experience with Ireland, and many attempts to subdue Irish rebellions, "Insurrection and rebellion

---

26. *Cherokee Advocate* (Tahlequah, Cherokee Nation), May 13, 1847.

27. Eliga H. Gould, *Among the Powers of the Earth: The American Revolution and the Making of a New World Empire* (Cambridge, MA, 2012), 3. Fred Anderson and Andrew R. L. Cayton, *The Dominion of War: Empire and Liberty in North America, 1500–2000* (New York, 2005), 66. Patrick Wolfe, "After the Frontier: Separation and Absorption in US Indian Policy," *Settler Colonial Studies* 1, no. 1 (2011), 13–51.

have been the order of the day, and yet, up to this time, Ireland remains." He went on to warn Americans of the dangers of imposing restrictive policies on an unwilling population, noting, "Every Irishman hates, with a mortal hatred, his Saxon oppressor." In using an imperial example, Clay tacitly compared American and British political structures, and cautioned that if the United States continued down a path of westward expansion, it could not help but replicate Britain's failures. Many scholars characterize American westward expansion, the doctrine of manifest destiny, Indian removal, and proselytizing missions in the trans-Mississippi West as imperial behavior if not formal imperialism.[28]

Newspapers that circulated within Indian Territory also took Britain to task for its treatment of Ireland. In late 1845 the *New York Herald* noted "Ireland is annexed to England—and how? By bribery—by treason—by corruption—by blood poured out! It is held annexed, by force and by the bayonet, in spite of the loud cry of her nine millions against it—she is robbed, starved, and plundered by the forced annexation and forced continued union." The *Arkansas Intelligencer* took a broader swipe at British policy. In February of 1846 it asked, given European, and particularly British, attacks on Republican France "why may not the Republic of the United States, for a similar reason, oppose the coronation and ascension of a king of Nova Scotia—Oregon—California—Newfoundland—Mexico or that mosquito shores, and in case of resistance on the part of England, to bring out the morning gun of the Revolution?" The *Cherokee Advocate* also had harsh words for British treatment of the Irish. In May of 1847, it summarized commentary from newspapers in New York and Ohio that claimed that it was the "oppressed condition" forced in the Irish by Britain, rather than any intrinsic failures of Irish people or soil, "that is to be deplored." An anonymous Cherokee commentator noted, "The Irish nation is tithed and taxed and rented until the energies of the people are subdued, until there is no wonder that they suffer and die—these facts even thus succinctly stated, we believe will be of interest to our readers." For these writers, the Irish famine served as an opportunity to critique British governance, and particularly Britain's arbitrary power over colonial

---

28. Henry Clay, "Speech on the War with Mexico," Lexington, KY, Nov. 13, 1847. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1993).

spaces. The themes raised by these critiques both paralleled Native experiences, and were deemed "of interest" to Indian readers.[29]

While few people in the 1840s—either Indians or white Americans—were using the language of imperialism to describe U.S.–Indian relations, some were drawing connections between American Indian policy and other examples of poor governance. Articulations of Cherokee nationhood in the years before removal turned critiques of what Andrew Denson has called "state coercion and federal neglect" along with the failure of the United States government to act responsibly toward sovereign nations. A memorial addressed to Congress in 1829 deployed the language of duplicity in its characterization of American Indian policy, asking how Indians should view "the conduct of the United States . . . in their intercourse with us" when, although "the right of inheritance we have *never ceded,* nor ever *forfeited*," Native lands were nevertheless being seized. The memorialists went on to contend that "they have ever been deceived as to how the government regarded them" and that removal "would be in the highest degree oppressive." A similar claim was put forth at by the memorial produced at a meeting in Philadelphia in 1830, asking "shall a government founded on that celebrated exposition of the rights of man, which accompanied our declaration of independence, grossly violate those rights in others." The speaker went on to ask, given that Indian nations had long been treated as independent and sovereign, "can a people be viewed as the friends of liberty at home, who are ready to avail themselves of superior strength to exercise tyranny abroad?" Speaking against removal in Boston in 1832, the Cherokee Chief John Ridge compared "his people," with Bostonians' revolutionary ancestors, whose "first was made against the designs of Great Britain to enslave this people [of the American colonies]." A letter written to an Augusta, Georgia, paper in 1835 described the actions of a U.S. agent responsible for orchestrating westward migration as those of an impetuous "European monarch," arbitrarily deploying force against his Indian charges.[30]

29. *New York Daily Herald,* Dec. 24, 1845; *Arkansas Intelligencer* (Van Buren), Feb. 21, 1846. *Cherokee Advocate* (Tahlequah, Cherokee Nation), May 6, 1847.

30. Denson, *Demanding the Cherokee Nation*, 25. "Memorial of the Cherokee Indians from the *Cherokee Phoenix,*" *Niles' Weekly Register* (Baltimore), Mar. 13, 1830, 53. *A Vindication of the Cherokee Claims, Addressed to the Town Meeting in Philadelphia, on the 11th of January, 1830* (Philadelphia, 1830). *The Liberator*

It was precisely the tensions between the British practices criticized by Americans, and the United States' own behavior in the American West, that helped Cherokees and Choctaws place themselves in the same imaginative and philanthropic frame as the starving Irish. Critiques of imperialism and American Indian policy were more tepid in the Indian Territory press in the years after removal, but glimpses of them do appear. Without mentioning the ever-expanding United States, the *Cherokee Advocate* remarked on the dangers of imperial expansion in March of 1846 when it commented that "the vast complicated system of the British Empire is hard to keep in perfect order, and when a rupture does take place it will be terrible in its nature." In 1847, the same paper republished an article from the New York *Tribune* that highlighted the dangers posed by "foreign landlords" who had robbed the Irish people of autonomy over their own land. In the 1850s, the *Choctaw Telegraph* described American expansion in imperial terms. The paper reported, "'Westward the star of empire takes his way'—a friend remarked to us yesterday. . . . His words were startling." This description of American expansion was by no means as scathing or even critical, but the many explicit and often vitriolic critiques of Britain and its imperial aspirations created an information environment in which imperial expansion could have been—and was by many—considered to be a dangerous practice.[31]

These narratives about the failed imperialism of Britain and the quasi-imperial behavior of the United States underlay reports of the famine in western and Indian Territory newspapers. Cherokee and Choctaw decisions to give over eight hundred dollars to people "separated from [them] by hundreds of miles" took place against a background of geopolitical jockeying that made similarities between the treatment of the Irish by the British government and Indians by the American government difficult to ignore.[32]

>-!-◆>-·O-·◆>-!-≺
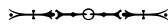
(Boston), Mar. 17, 1832. John M. Coward, *The Newspaper Indian: Native American Identity in the Press, 1820–90* (Champaign, IL, 1999), 79–80.

31. *Cherokee Advocate* (Tahlequah, Cherokee Nation), Mar. 5, 1846. *Cherokee Advocate,* May 6, 1847. *Choctaw Telegraph* (Doaksville, Choctaw Nation), July 4, 1850.

32. *Cherokee Advocate* (Tahlequah, Cherokee Nation), May 13, 1847.

In their review of approaches to the political history of the early American republic, Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson, and David Waldstreicher rightly noted "ordinary people may have seized popular politics—and cultural politics—precisely because real power and real economic resources were not so easily to be had." Aside from expressions of surprise at Native giving, no American commentators linked Cherokee and Choctaw philanthropy with an articulation of similarities between Indians and the Irish. From a policy perspective the Indian press's framing of these donations had no long-reaching political goals. However, neither were white commentators' assertions that Indians' wholesale acceptance of acculturation accepted. Writers in Indian Territory used reports of the famine and of famine philanthropy to highlight Native morality and capacity for fellow-feeling in contrast to prevailing American ideas that Indians required white guidance in order to act in a humanitarian way. They also cast the donations as a form of political action in the face of the violent expropriation of only a decade before, and paralleled other contemporary attempts, most notably those of American abolitionists, to co-opt Irish distress in service of particular political aims. Finally, given the internecine violence that especially plagued the Cherokee Nation in the 1840s, these donations presented an alternative image of post-removal Indian Territory, one that emphasized inherently Native morality and sympathy rather than barbarism. At a moment when philanthropic practices were changing from immediate help for the proximate to institutionalized help for the generalized masses, when Native peoples were being pushed to the literal and figurative edges of American space, and when access to the political power required to critique U.S. policy was beginning to open up somewhat, writers in Indian Territory took giving practices traditionally classed as white and middle class, and cast them as their own.[33]

33. Jeffrey L. Pasley, Andrew W. Robertson, and David Waldstreicher, "Introduction: Beyond the Founders," in *Beyond the Founders*, 10. W. Caleb McDaniel, "Repealing Unions: American Abolitionists, Irish Repeal, and the Origins of Garrisonian Disunionism," *Journal of the Early Republic* 28 (Summer 2008), 243–69. Patricia Ferreira, "All But 'A Black Skin and Wooly Hair': Frederick Douglass's Witness of the Irish Famine," *American Studies International* 37, no. 2 (1999), 69–83.